
Real Choices in New Haven

Promoting Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Our Community • Summer 2004 Publication



Presentation on Accessible Voting to Celebrate the 14th Anniversary of the Signing of the ADA

By Diane Verde

On Monday, July 26, 2004, the Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Office of Protection and Advocacy, the University of Connecticut, and the A.J. Pappanikou Center for Developmental Disabilities will celebrate the 14th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. To commemorate the event, they will present a program on accessible voting which will include information on barriers for individuals with disabilities and a demonstration on how to use voting machines. Participants will also have the opportunity to register to vote. The event will take place between 10 A.M. and 12 P.M. in the Legislative Office Building, located at 300 Capitol Avenue in Hartford. All are invited to attend. Interpreters for the deaf will be provided.

Free Sail Connecticut Access Program Sailing Events for Members with Disabilities

By Karen Roseman

Since 1989, the Sail Connecticut Access Program has been giving individuals with disabilities the opportunity to sail, not only as passengers but also as skippers; the Program instructs individuals with disabilities on how to pilot fully-adapted, equipped sailboats. Sail Connecticut operates through Pilot's Point Marina in Westbrook, CT.

On the following Member Sailing Day Saturdays: July 10, August 14th, and September 11th, free sailing will be available to individuals with disabilities who have paid a small membership fee. Member Sailing Day events begin with a party at the dock, complete with a complimentary cooler of soft drinks. Participants are encouraged to bring and share non-mess-causing snacks and non-alcoholic beverages, and are strongly urged to bring jackets, hats, and sunscreen. Sailing instructors, mates, and volunteer skippers then take participants sailing in Sail Connecticut program boats. Ever year, nearly 150 individuals with disabilities participate in these sailing events, which take place between 10 AM and 4 PM at Pilot's Point Marina in Westbrook.

To reach Pilot's Point Marina, take I-95 to exit 65 and then head south on Route



154 to the center of Westbrook. Make a right to head west on Route 1, and the marina entrance will be about a mile further on the left.



Persons interested in participating in Member Sailing Day events may fill out membership applications at the Sail Connecticut Access Program website (<http://www.sailctaccess.org>). Individuals planning to sail on any of the Member Sailing Day Saturdays are requested to please call (860) 664-9395 so that communication assistance may be arranged. In case of bad weather, events will be moved to the following Sundays. For more information on rain dates, please call Carole at (860) 664-9395 or the dock-side phone at (860) 304-6588. You may also send an e-mail to info@sailctaccess.org. For more information about Member Sailing Day events in general, please call (860) 664-9395 or visit the Sail Connecticut Access Program website at <http://www.sailctaccess.org>.

* Much information for this article was taken from the Sail Connecticut Access Program website (<http://www.sailctaccess.org>).



2003

How Will Future See the Americans with Disabilities Act?



By Melissa Marshall



Sometimes I wonder what future generations will make of the Americans with Disabilities Act. I imagine anthropologists from another time or another solar system discovering it in a time capsule. In my fantasy, the ADA is one of the few artifacts of today's society that exists. The anthropologists' mission is to discern information about our society from this one surviving document.

The anthropologists, in a way, got lucky. How a people solve a problem gives tremendous insight into a culture's thought processes and values. This is what I imagine the future anthropologists' report might say:

"The civilization that created the ADA is fascinating. As far as we know, for the first time in the history of the planet a civilization enacted law to protect people with disabilities from what was referred to as 'discrimination.' It appears that people with disabilities had previously been treated unjustly. They were 'discriminated' against by employers, educators, business owners, and even their own government officials. By 'discrimination,' these people meant that buildings were constructed without their needs in mind, services and devices for those with communication disabilities were not provided, and sometimes these people were excluded. Sometimes people with disabilities were prohibited from participating in their society because they were regarded as inferior or because non-disabled people were frightened of or made uncomfortable by them. Given the general feelings about people with disabilities, which are documented in something called a legislative history, it is quite extraordinary that this society ever decided to give equal rights to people with disabilities.

This primitive society, recognizing that it had treated people with disabilities egregiously, resolved to remedy the inequity. Especially given this society's feelings and attitudes (which were reflected in the legislative history), this is highly commendable.

Through Congress, its national legislative body, this primitive society made a commitment to treat people with disabilities as equal to those without. It pledged to remove structural barriers and provide the technology and services necessary for individuals whose communication ability was limited by their disability. It committed to modifying behaviors and policies when necessary to avoid discriminating against people with disabilities. It also resolved to problem-solve when necessary to provide equal opportunities to people with disabilities. Again, this is commendable.

It is particularly extraordinary that this law extended its protections to people with a wide variety of disabilities. From the legislative history, it seems that people with different disabilities were regarded differently. Apparently, certain disabilities were viewed as more threatening than others. For example, people with psychiatric disabilities were stigmatized. This may be due to a then popular myth that people with psychiatric disabilities were more likely to be violent than were others (This myth was never supported by any of this society's research, incidentally. In fact, people with psychiatric disabilities were more likely to be victims of crime than were those without disabilities). People with AIDS were also among those stigmatized, probably due to the fact that many gay men contracted this once fatal disease (It seems there was an irrational fear of and prejudice against people who chose same-sex partners). Yet, this law guaranteed equality for all people with disabilities, not just for those who were more favored.

This law reflects that the society that enacted it was compassionate and committed to justice, even when it caused people discomfort. Having said that, it becomes obvious that the social skills of this group of people, both individually and as a civilization, were primitive. The fact that this society had to make *laws* to limit what amounts to the oppression of its own people is sobering. Yet, we, ourselves, should be compassionate in forming opinions about the members of this society. They recognized a fundamental flaw in the workings of their society and attempted to change it.

We are limited in our ability to draw conclusions from this document. In order to form a scholarly opinion about the stage of social evolution of these people, we would need information about what happened after this law was passed. Was it repealed in a panic after members of the society realized its ramifications? Did this society keep the promise of justice and equality for people with disabilities that it made when enacting the ADA, or did it gradually retreat from this promise? Or, as we can hope, did it tenaciously adhere to the law, even though doing so was difficult at times? It is only by knowing the answers to these questions that we can form an opinion about the social maturity of these people and their true capacities for justice and compassion."

Correct Terminology: Person-First Language – Part Two

By Radha Shenoy

In the Spring 2004 issue of *Real Choices in New Haven* there was a chart of terms to use when talking about persons with disabilities. This chart is a continuation of the topic. The next issue will contain Part Three, of this three part series.

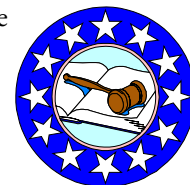
TERMS TO AVOID	“WORDS WITH DIGNITY” ⁸
AIDS victim	Person living with HIV, Person with AIDS, Person living with AIDS
Slow learner, Underachiever, ²⁵ Slow, ²⁶ Retarded, Lazy, ²⁷ Stupid, ²⁸ Mentally Different	Person with a learning disability
Mentally disabled	Person with a psychiatric disability, Person with retardation, People with a learning disability, Person with a cognitive impairment
Mentally retarded, Retarded, The Retarded, Retard, ²⁹ Moron, ³⁰ Imbecile, ³¹ Subnormal	Person with Mental retardation
Normal, ³² Able-bodied, Temporarily able-bodied, Healthy, Whole	Person who is non-disabled ³³
Polio victim, “a post-polio” ³⁴	Person with post-polio syndrome, Person who has had polio ³⁵
Crazy, ³⁶ Maniac, ³⁷ Lunatic, ³⁸ Demented, Schizo, Psycho, Insane, ³⁹ Mental Patient, ⁴⁰ Wacko, ⁴¹ Madman ⁴²	Person with a psychiatric disability, Person with a psychiatric illness, Person with a psychiatric history, ⁴³ Person with an emotional disorder, Person with a mental disability
Spastic, ⁴⁴ Epileptic, ⁴⁵ having Fits or Attacks, Paralytic ⁴⁶	Person with epilepsy, ⁴⁷ Person with a seizure disorder
Dwarf, Midget	Person of small stature, Person of short stature

** Citation available upon request (Please call (203) 946-7833)

Law Enacted Protects Persons with Disabilities Under Existing Connecticut Hate Crime Laws

By Radha Shenoy

In 1990, the state of Connecticut passed a hate crime statute which sought to lessen the incidence of hate crimes by intensifying penalties for crimes motivated by the consideration of a person’s race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. On May 21, 2004, the Governor signed a bill that amended and broadened the existing Connecticut hate crime statute by passing House Bill 5657, a hate crime bill which protects persons wronged on account of disability or “gender identity or expression.” The bill passed through the House and Senate with ease, due in large part to the tireless efforts of the Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF), overwhelming support from constituents with disabilities, and a coalition of more than 35 Connecticut organizations known collectively as the Connecticut Hate Crimes Network.



Before the passage of this bill, persons within the disability community had no protection under hate crime legislation, even if targeted specifically because of their disability. Connecticut has now become the 22nd state to include individuals with disabilities in its hate crime legislation.

** Information for this article was taken from the April 30, 2004 CWEALF press release by Erica Donahue, entitled “Hate Crime Bill Passes to Include ‘Gender Identity/Expression’ and ‘Disability.’ *Bill passes through House & Senate with Overwhelming Support.*”

Accessibility Evaluations of New Haven Facilities

We will be publishing articles that discuss the accessible features of restaurants and cultural facilities throughout New Haven. This issue contains articles on the *Connecticut Children's Museum*. We hope that you will find this information useful.

Access Evaluation of the: *The Connecticut Children's Museum*

By Elanah Sherman



In all areas: structural access, effective communication, and general non-discrimination, the Connecticut Children's Museum, located at 22 Wall Street, excels in making accessibility a routine part of its operation. The Museum is very sensitive to input from its child patrons, who have suggested many of the accessibility improvements that the Museum has implemented.

The Children's Museum has taken exceptionally outstanding efforts to make improvements in effective communication, Brailleing all books used in its regular storybook sessions and installing permanent, Braille-containing labels. The Museum has also developed original, tactile signs, such as raised diagrams of the museum's features, that make the experience of museum-going as accessible as possible to guests with visual impairments. Amongst several modifications, the Museum has even Brailled a set of blocks to make play materials accessible to children with visual impairments. In an effort to acquaint hearing guests with the language of sign, wall drawings of people signing accompany some of the Museum's permanent exhibits, and sign language remains a regular feature of several of the Museum's programs.



Though without any serious accessibility issues, the Museum does have a few minor problems. The Museum has no parking lot or on-street, accessible parking, although there is accessible on-street parking on the surrounding streets. The main door is heavy, closes quickly, and presents a threshold that is a bit high. The interior door, leading to the elevator area, is also heavy. Conditions in both of the Museum's unisex bathrooms are fairly equal — the seats are somewhat low by adult standards, but are quite suitable for children and should not be altered. The rear grab bars in both bathrooms are short and there transfer room beside the toilets is tight.

A few of the Museum's exhibits also present some accessibility issues. For example, the doorway to the Chalk House has a one-inch lip and reduced clearance. The desk play area entrance also has reduced clearance. Because of cramped conditions, some of the drums in the drum exhibit are impossible for children using wheelchairs to access.

In spite of these accessibility issues, The Connecticut Children's Museum is by far the most exceptionally disability-aware arts institution in the area and is highly recommended to those with and without disabilities.



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